

Chairman's Summary

Overview

The 2020 INSARAG Africa-Europe-Middle East Regional Meeting took place on 30 September virtually, due to the travel restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The meeting discussed INSARAG's strategic and operational issues for the region and was organized by the Government of the Republic of Poland, with the support of the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

The Regional Meeting was co-facilitated by the State Fire Service of Poland and OCHA's Emergency Response Section in its capacity as the INSARAG Secretariat. General Andrzej Bartkowiak, Chief Commandant of the State Fire Service attended the meeting. The presentations, resource materials and products from the meeting sessions are available on the INSARAG website: <http://insarag.org>. The meeting agenda adopted by the participants can be found in [Annex A](#).

The meeting brought together 107 officials from diplomatic authorities and national disaster management agencies from 43 countries and organizations, as well as UN INSARAG representatives (Please see Participants list in [Annex B](#)). Polish delegates promoted and shared global policy objectives and considered a strategic priority from the 2020 Steering Group meeting namely the concept of Flexible Response. Inputs from the meeting will be consolidated together with those from the other two regional meetings and will be shared with the INSARAG Steering Group in 2021. Under Poland's leadership, the meeting sought to advance INSARAG strategic and operational priorities in the region, taking into account preliminary observations from the international response to the Beirut port explosions.

Session 1 – Welcome and Introduction of the Meeting Agenda, Adoption of the agenda

Mr. Sebastian Rhodes Stampa welcomed the participants and expressed his appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Poland and the State Fire Service in Poland for hosting the meeting. Given the exceptional circumstances due to the COVID-19 pandemic, he noted that the INSARAG Global meeting had to be postponed until 2021. The pandemic has forced INSARAG members to reconsider their priorities, in terms of preparedness and response, as they were all on the frontline in the fight against COVID-19. In order to allow members to maintain their readiness status, the Secretariat decided to extend their classification status for two additional years. The INSARAG USAR teams that deployed to Lebanon, in response to the Beirut port explosions, were applauded. Although there were no live rescues during the operation, the work conducted in support of the Lebanese Government showed the flexibility of the system and confirmed the importance of "beyond the rubble" work. The Lebanon response also provided an opportunity for the network to test recent IM tools, such as ICMS, led by the IM Working Group, as well as the new concept of the Damage Assessment Coordination Centre initiated in Albania last year.

General Andrzej Bartkowiak confirmed Poland's commitment to INSARAG and highlighted Poland's participation in the response to the Beirut port explosions as an example of Poland's commitment to international emergency response. Challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic are expected to lead to more resilience and better preparedness and response in the future. The importance of the INSARAG Global Meeting in Poland in 2021 was reiterated as an opportunity to share experiences and lessons learnt.

On behalf of the AEME Regional Chair, Mr. Mariusz Feltynowski, Master of Ceremony, introduced the meeting agenda, which was formally adopted by the participants.

Session 2 – Flexible response presentation

Mr. Marcin Kedra, State Fire Service of Poland, presented the Flexible Response questionnaire circulated among members from the AEME region.

The participants were requested to share their understanding of a "flexible response" by considering the three options: 1) - INSARAG should remain an urban search and rescue capacity response network only; 2) - USAR teams should be ready to adjust and accommodate the 'Beyond the Rubble' concept; and 3) - INSARAG is not just USAR focussed, it should be much more and needs to adjust for additional operations, if requested or required.

The results of the survey revealed that almost 80% of the 14 respondents were not in favour of INSARAG developing capacities for other types of rescue operations. Rather, the 'Beyond the Rubble' concept should be developed and described in more detail.

INSARAG Policy and Operations Focal points of AEME member states that did not respond to the questionnaire could still participate by requesting the link to the questionnaire via email to kedramarcin@gmail.com. The requested date of return is 25 October 2020. Upcoming events related to the 'Flexible Response' discussion in 2020/2021 are as follows: The preparation

Chairman's Summary

of an AEME flexible response discussion outcome document, the End of Year Videoconference on 19 November 2020, and the ISG meeting in 2021 with a final decision on the flexible response way forward (May 2021). The Flexible response presentation can be found in [Annex C](#).

Session 3 – Working groups activities summary

Mr. Lucien Jaggi, INSARAG Secretariat, provided an update on the activities of the Working Groups (TWG, MWG, IMWG, TGRG, IEC/R review WG) on behalf of the Chairs of the Working Groups. Mr. Sebastian Mocarquer, co-facilitator of the National Accreditation Working Group (NAWG), provided an update on behalf of the NAWG. An overview of the achievements of the INSARAG Working Groups is available for review on the INSARAG website.

- The Training Working Group (TWG) is working on a number of projects, such as: the revision of the USAR Coordination Manual; contribution to the revision of the Earthquake Response Exercise 2.0; contribution to the work of the IEC/R WG on Roster Review; design and development of the Exercise Handbook; contribution to the update of the INSARAG 1st Responder Training package.
- The Medical Working group (MWG) is working on preparing a position paper on responding in a COVID-19 environment, as well as conducting a survey for teams deployed to Lebanon, to collect good practices.. Participants were encouraged to contribute to the survey.
- The Light Team Working group reported that the first IEC is scheduled for November 2021.
- The Information Management Working Group (IMWG) used ICMS for the first time during a response operation and it is now working on the development and delivery online of training courses and resources for ICMS in a COVID-19 environment; the IMWG is also completing the change of INSARAG Forms and function into ICMS, identifying other functions like (DAC, UAV, Hazard information) to develop new ways of working and utilizing technology to deliver better outcomes, reviewing Lessons Learned from the Lebanon response and Recommendations of the IEC/R Review reports and: securing a long-term funding model for ICMS and subsequent technology improvements.
- The INSARAG External Classification/Reclassification review Working Group (IEC/R review WG) has been recently constituted and started its work.
- The Guidelines Review Group (GRG) is Transitioning to the T-GRG.
- Sebastian Mocarquer presented on the NAWG's two-phased work plan (August 2020 – August 2022), he announced dates of planned meetings and explained the concept of the survey, which is scheduled to be launched on 1 November.

The Africa-Europe-Middle East network appreciates the strong commitment and dedication of the Working Group members.

Session 4 – COVID-19 response summary

Ms. Stefania Trassari, INSARAG's Focal Point for Africa and the Middle East, provided a brief overview of the response in Lebanon from the Emergency Response Section's (ERS) perspective, describing the blast that occurred, providing some background on the existing humanitarian crisis in the country, which is complicated by the economic situation, coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic. She presented an overview of the USAR teams deployed and some of the activities conducted on the ground, praising the team's flexibility and ability to work under challenging circumstances.

Mr. Mariusz Feltynowski continued by presenting the main points from the perspective of the Polish USAR team, including challenges related to the absence of an RDC, a common Base of Operation and time lost between the team's arrival and the first meeting with LEMA. Quite challenging also to explain to Lebanese authorities the importance of the establishment of USAR coordination tools, including the assessment of affected areas. Mr. Feltynowski thanked the Qatar team for their support with translation during these meetings with LEMA.

Poland stressed the point on the number of USAR teams deployed compared to the work needed to be conducted on the ground. Indeed, the SAR phase ended three days after the blast and teams started to demobilize, while other teams were doing other types of work outside the harbor. However, due to security concerns, the teams could not continue operations and working at night was not allowed. Poland praised the good collaboration with the EUCPT and the Lebanese Armed Forces, as well as the support of ICMS and the work of the 447 USAR and 35 technical experts. THW reported that their team deployed as well, along with the members of ISAR Germany.

Based on a bilateral agreement, the USAR team from France (France02) deployed very quickly as a medium team, although the request for deployment also came through the ERCC. One of the lessons observed was the importance of explaining in advance to the Lebanese Authorities the methodology of USAR operations, as they refused to let teams establish an RDC,

Chairman's Summary

which made coordination difficult for incoming teams. ICMS was proven to be very beneficial, even though the French team was not trained on this methodology. It is important to limit the interferences on the platform from people outside the operation.

USAR.NL deployed very quickly, despite the challenges related to COVID-19. The team focused on disaster assessment, as well as on medical support for injured people.

Italy reported that their team deployed jointly during a week with five fire brigades and the army to support the operation. The main component of the team was a CBRN capacity to assess the situation, monitor different areas of Beirut and support other USAR teams and the Lebanese authorities in ensuring their safety.

Session 5 – Discussion on issues arising from the Global Mid-Year Call and INSARAG Global Updates (including INSARAG Global Strategy 2017-2020)

Mr. Martijn Viersma, INSARAG's Focal Point for Europe and CIS Region, presented INSARAG Global Updates, highlighting various regional priorities and global events in 2020.

Since April, all events on INSARAG's Agenda requiring physical engagement in 2020 have been postponed. Saudi Arabia's IER in December is pending a Go-No Go decision in October, two months before the event, given the pandemic situation and duty of care arrangements in place.

INSARAG's 30th Anniversary Global Meeting has been postponed to October 2021, along with Regional, Team Leaders, and Working Group meetings.

INSARAG Teams proved that they can and will respond, regardless of COVID-19 restrictions as was the case in the Beirut explosions case, with the deployment of 12 INSARAG Teams. An After-Action Review (AAR) will be held on 04-05 November 2020 to map lessons learnt on the UCC, ICMS, DACC, Beyond the Rubble and Medical considerations during operations in a pandemic. The AAR report will be shared with the network.

Several Working Groups, and the new NAWG, IEC/R WG, are now working and reviewing various tools and systems to further harness the collective synergies within and across networks.

Issues Arising from the Global Mid-Year Call and Preparing for the End of Year Call:

International deployment: As of 23 September, 23 INSARAG Teams have indicated their availability to deploy in case of an emergency on the VO (<https://vosocc.unocha.org/>) with caveats for international deployment. Four AP Teams, 18 AEME Teams and one Team from the Americas). The Beirut Port Blast Response clearly demonstrated that an overwhelming disaster can override COVID-19 considerations.

Remote Support: INSARAG will continue to bolster partnerships with local responders and strengthen community preparedness.

First Responders Program - v2.0: THW Germany has successfully conducted the training courses in China, Georgia and Iraq and will lead the review of the program, with the support of the TWG, which developed the first version. A "marketing video" will also be developed by Germany for the network to be shared with disaster-prone countries encouraging them to adopt this program for a better prepared community. The v2.0 will be circulated during the ISG 2021 and will be launched at the IGM in 2021.

National Accreditation Working Group (NAWG): Virtual Meetings started in August. The Roadmap will be presented by the Co-Chairs Chen Hong and Sebastian and/or their regional Representatives later this meeting. The Regional Group discussed their regional TSG/TRG plans and invited countries willing to adopt the NAP and IRNAP to follow up.

Flexible response: Regional Chairs are discussing the Flexible Response Concept Note in Annex A in the 2020 Regional Meetings and will share their comments and views by 15 October with the Secretariat for consolidation. A consolidated report will be tabled for discussion at the ISG 2021.

IEC/Rs: IECs will be prioritized and teams due for IERs have welcomed the postponement of their IERs by one or two years. The INSARAG Secretariat will share the number of IEC/Rs for 2021/2022/2023 following the response from teams requesting extensions.

Remote events – Policy (Regional Meetings): Regional Chairs and Members were requested to inform their Regional Focal Points in the INSARAG Secretariat on changes to be reflected in the next calendar version by the end of every month. The new draft INSARAG calendar (version September) is now published on www.insarag.org.

Chairman's Summary

Remote events – Technical (Specialized Meetings led by WGs): All WGs are involved in meetings and planning for remote training events in the upcoming months.

IGM and Warsaw Declaration (WD): Poland with the INSARAG Secretariat will share a new working timeline and draft Warsaw Declaration, to be discussed at ISG 2021.

IEC/R WG: A roadmap will be presented by the Co-Chairs and/or their Regional Representatives in the Regional meetings.

ERE V2.0: Bilateral consultations are ongoing, and the final draft will be tabled at the ISG 2021 for endorsement.

WG Governance Survey: Regional Chairs will discuss the Final Draft Analysis in (Annex C) and will share their regional comments and views by 15 October with the INSARAG Secretariat for consolidation. A consolidated report will be discussed at the ISG 2021.

INSARAG Strategic Plan 2021-2026: Regional Chairs will discuss the Strategic Plan 2021-2026 (Annex D) during the Regional Meetings 2020 and share their feedback by 15 October with the INSARAG Secretariat for consolidation. A consolidated report will be presented for endorsement at the EOY Call.

Session 6 – Official Address Global Chair INSARAG, Ambassador Manuel Bessler

Ambassador Manuel Bessler, the INSARAG Global Chair and Deputy Director General, Head of the Humanitarian Aid Department and Head of the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit addressed the participants.

Considering the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic that affects all of us, the INSARAG network will have to jointly adopt a high degree of flexibility in order to adapt to this evolutive situation. Implementing a flexible approach in facing modern humanitarian crises would enable the network to continue providing high-quality assistance in emergency preparedness and response, to the people we serve.

The INSARAG network plays a particularly important role, aiming to support populations and states in need, in times of crises and disasters. Thanks to the implementation of a flexible approach in facing modern humanitarian crises, the significant engagement of INSARAG members in COVID-19 national responses has proven the effectiveness and flexibility of the network and has saved many lives threatened by the pandemic all around the world.

The Beirut Port explosions affirm that responding to rescue victims trapped under tonnes of debris in a pandemic environment seems almost an impossible task when the rules clearly prescribe face masks, safe distancing and regular hand hygiene makes the operational environment so challenging. International teams also supported local authorities in specific tasks, such as the assessment of structural damage and integrity, and the detection of hazardous materials - the 'Beyond the Rubble' operations. INSARAG members were requested to strictly follow the endorsed INSARAG Guidelines and deploy in coordination with the host country/local emergency authority.

This year is particularly important since 2020 marks the celebration of INSARAG's 30 years of life-saving assistance. The creation of the National Accreditation Working Group was decided, as well to contribute to the strengthening of national capacities for coordination of national and international USAR assistance by establishing an INSARAG Recognised National Accreditation Process. Furthermore, to stay fit for purpose, the Steering Group has agreed on the endorsement of the new version of the INSARAG Guidelines, effective as of 1 January 2021, as well as the revision of the Earthquake Response Exercise package and the discussion on the flexible response. In these days, it was shown how much these are needed.

The Global Chair thanked the Steering Group, including Regional and Working Group Chairs and members, as well as all participants involved, for the enriching discussions and resolute decision making throughout the year. The contributions, dedication and unwavering commitment help to improve and nurture the network.

Ambassador Bessler concluded by congratulating those present and offering the best wishes for the INSARAG 30th anniversary. In these uncertain times, INSARAG will rise to the challenges by adopting new ways of working while building on a strong tradition of dialogue and collaboration.

Chairman's Summary

Session 7 – Regional Chairs Updates on their regional Workplans

Mr. Eduardo José Gonzáles Angulo, Chair for the Americas and the Caribbean Region, provided an overview of the four priorities in his region in 2020: To contribute to the definition of global INSARAG strategies and priorities (Priority 1); to strengthen the IRNAP process in the region and globally (Priority 2); to strengthen USAR coordination capacities in the region (Priority 3); and to strengthen alliances with “sister” response partners and networks to increase the efficiency of emergency preparedness and response (Priority 4). He presented the activities undertaken in 2020. To meet the first priority, the chair conducted a regional survey on flexible assistance (200 responses were received), translated the INSARAG 2020 Guidelines into Spanish and Portuguese, and translated the guidance note to advise teams on national response protocols developed by FEMA’s USAR National Response System of the United States. Activities which took place to respond to the second priority are: Participation in the Working Group on National Accreditation Processes (Chile as a co-chair of the Working Group with China; countries in the region that are actively participating are Mexico, USA, Colombia, Chile, and Argentina) and the support of countries in implementing IRNAP through GTA/GTR (Panama is currently undergoing the process). Additional activities for achieving the objectives of the third priority are: A workshop from June 2 to 5 to design the USAR Coordination course (UCC) at a national level (8 countries participated, 11 people); one webinar between INSARAG and EMT on the topic of USAR in the COVID-19 Environment (15 countries participated, 250 people). In response to Priority 4; a virtual SIMEX is planned for 2021 in Peru (in the preparation phase) and invitations were sent to countries to be part of INSARAG, Grenada expressed interest and accepted the invitation.

Mr. Anwar Abdullah, on behalf of the Asia-Pacific Regional Chair, provided an overview of the Asia-Pacific regional activities in 2020. He presented the objectives as follows: 1) Enhancing multi-level capacity building and protection in humanitarian responses; 2) Strengthening effective national and regional response during a disaster and 3) Strengthening engagement with partners in disaster planning and management. The key initiatives for the AP Region in 2020 have been: to strengthen the National and Regional response through a National Accreditation Process (NAP) and to develop a INSARAG Recognized National Accreditation Process (IRNAP) framework in the AP region; the formation of a regional Training Work Group (led by members of the TWG from the AP region) and to conduct virtual webinars. Singapore will conduct three sessions of the Senior Executive Programme in Disaster Management Webinar from 28 to 30 October 2020 (one of the sessions will be on Introduction to the new INSARAG Guidelines 2020).

Session 8 – INSARAG AEME Workplan for 2020 – Discussion on Workplan 2021

Mr. Mariusz Feltynowski opened the session by thanking Italy and South Africa for their excellent collaboration as part of the Troika. He noted that a new country would need to step forward and serve as the Regional Chair in 2022. Preparatory work is ongoing to reach out to potential candidates.

Almost all events for 2020 have been postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and all meetings have taken place remotely. The calendar for next year looks already very busy and it would be necessary to prioritize events for 2021. Poland presented the goals for 2020-2025: “Flexible response”; “Promote and support the building of effective national USAR response”; and “Improve the quality and coordination of international USAR response”, while reminding the participants about the INSARAG Strategic Plan 2021-2026.

Key future events are the end of Year Videoconference of Global Chair and Regional Chairs/WGs Chairs planned for 19 November 2020 and the INSARAG Steering Group meeting on 21 May in Geneva, as well as the INSARAG Global meeting together with Working Group meetings, Team Leaders and Regional Meetings from 3-8 October 2021 at the Main School of Fire Service in Warsaw, Poland.

On the priorities for 2021, Mr. Feltynowski suggested that members from the regional group focus on Strategic Objective 1: “Quality standards”,

Objective 1.3: Encourage USAR teams mandated for international deployments to participate in the IEC and IER process and to contribute to the strengthening of the process. Action Plan: USAR teams engage in the review of the IEC/R roster and implement the recommendations. Suggestions to fulfill this are: 1) Identification of USAR Teams willing to provide international assistance and support them in the IEC preparation; 2) Capacity assessment missions, based on request by country.

On Strategic Objective 2: “Localisation”, Objective 2.2: Promote capacity development at national and local level and strengthen community preparedness. Action Plan: Regional Groups to support disaster-prone countries in exploring ways to implement the National Accreditation Process and the INSARAG First-Responders Training Package for community’s response. A suggestion to fulfill this is the continuous bilateral support to priority African countries.

Chairman's Summary

On Objective 3.2: "Flexible response", : Promote new ways of working to be functional in difficult circumstances, such as the COVID-19 crisis, to be ready when disasters strike, and to stay fit for purpose in an evolving operating environment. Action Plan: INSARAG explores and further develops new ways of working, such as remote opportunities in support of response operations, meetings, trainings and exercises. Poland suggested fulfilling the goal by developing lessons learned and good practises from COVID-19 related preparations plans which would be incorporated into Guidance notes (on INSARAG.org or on the next version of the INSARAG Guidelines).

The INSARAG AEME Workplan 2020 presentation can be found in [Annex D](#).

Session 9 – Call for interest for Regional Chair 2022

The AEME group thanked Poland as the Chair for 2020 and welcomed the AEME Troika for 2021, where South Africa will serve as the AEME Chair, and Poland as the outgoing Chair. For the moment, there was no member states expressing interest in taking on the role of incoming Chair. Ms. Stefania Trassari encouraged members from the AEME region to provide regional parity among the chairmanship and said that she would bilaterally contact members states on this issue. The Chair, Mr. Mariusz Feltynowski, offered to reach out to other European Members if members from the Middle East region would not be forthcoming.

Session 10 – Any other business/Closing of the meeting

On behalf of the AEME Regional Chair, Mr. Mariusz Feltynowski expressed appreciation for the Regional Meeting. All participants were invited to join the upcoming INSARAG Global Meeting (3 - 8 October 2021 in Warsaw, Poland).

On behalf of the INSARAG Secretariat, Mr. Martijn Viersma thanked the State Fire Service of Poland for hosting the meeting, as well as the INSARAG Global Chair and Regional Chairs for their interventions. He further expressed deep appreciation for the strong commitment of the INSARAG network and encouraged members to contact the Secretariat, whenever the need arises.

ANNEXES:

- Annex A: Meeting Agenda
- Annex B: Participants List
- Annex C: Flexible response presentation
- Annex D: INSARAG AEME Workplan 2020 presentation